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## The Last

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THE LAST

by

Tony D. Riel

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of

Arts in

Studio Art

at

Lindenwood University

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THE LAST

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
at  
Lindenwood University

By

Tony Riel

Saint Charles, Missouri

March 2021

## **Abstract**

The Last

Tony D. Riel, Master of Arts in Studio Art, 2021

Grant Hargate, Professor of Studio Art

This thesis shares a collection of paintings that demonstrates my understanding of how to paint still lifes using oil paint. The tools, preparation, steps, and techniques other still life painters have used to create paintings were examined in-depth and were applied by me to create my still life paintings. Food is the subject of my paintings. My family's eating habits and wastefulness of food were my sources of inspiration. My observations took place at the end of mealtimes because that is when I noticed that my family tends to not eat every piece of food. This often means there are one or two pieces or bites left to eat. Instead of eating these remaining pieces of food, they get thrown away or left to go bad. I have chosen to highlight those last remaining pieces or bites of food through this collection of paintings. Accompanying each painting are short stories. Each short story provides context for each painting, helping viewers understand the paintings better and providing a glimpse into my life around mealtime.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my thesis committee members, Professor Grant Hargate, Professor Dennis Schmickle, and Professor John Troy, for their knowledge, critique, and guidance throughout my process of learning how to paint, becoming a better person, and a more well-rounded artist.

I would like to thank Professor Dr. James Hutson for his willingness to always answer questions and for his guidance through this journey.

Most of all, I need to thank my wife Amie and our four children, Noelle, Jude, Luke, and Job, for their love, support, and understanding. You all believed in me and reassured me that the sacrifices were worth it. Thank you!

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## **Introduction/ Background Information**

My project has been a personal exploration of how to paint, specifically using oil paints as my medium. I have never formally taken any painting classes before. My goal in pursuing my master's degree was to learn how to paint, focusing on traditional painting techniques, developing a series of paintings that would provide me the ability to stay focused on one topic, but also show growth through experimentation and mastery of skills. My formal training has been in media arts. I would consider myself an artist that dabbles in many areas of art, and I have found that painting is an area where I want to improve and learn more about. I am a high school art teacher, and I offer a diverse curriculum to my students. One of the areas I specifically wanted to improve was my knowledge of painting. I want to be able to be a confident educator and share the knowledge I have gained through this experience with my students. I also feel this process of self-discovery has allowed me to learn on my own, through experimentation, trial, and error. Studying the works of other artists and critiques has also helped guide my series of paintings.

Through my series of paintings, entitled *The Last*, I have looked at the subject of food in a new and innovative way. The idea for my painting series came from watching members of my family not finish their meals at home. Before taking their first bite, they are presented with delicious food that has been made in a way to satisfy their hunger cravings. Through my research of still-life painters, I began to note that many of the artists who chose to use food as a subject would often present that subject in desirable whole form. I started to notice that, when my family was done eating, there would often be one piece or one bite of food remaining on their

plates. This leads me to question why someone would just leave one piece or one bite. Why couldn't they just eat the last one, so it wouldn't get thrown away? I also noticed that my family got tired of eating the same thing over and over again. One example of this would be, when making a cake for everyone to eat, they would all be very excited about the first piece. The next day, they may still want a slice, but by the third day, they no longer have any desire to have another piece, so there it sits, getting old. The remaining food gets to a point where it is so old that no one wants any more of it, and it has to be thrown away. Through my observations, I began noticing interesting subjects, compositions, and narratives with these remaining pieces of food, leading me to create paintings of these last pieces and bites of food.

## **Literature Review**

### **Still Life and Oil Paint: An Artist's Gateway**

Many budding artists wrestle with wanting to paint but wonder what to paint and where to start. Often, people who are interested in art have had exposure to many different types of artwork throughout their lifetime. They know that some artists paint from their imagination, others from nature, and others from daily life. They may also know that there are many different media from which to choose. The question remains; where does one begin? Choosing the right subject and best media for beginners can be the difference between discouragement and encouragement for excited young artists. For someone who has never painted before, learning to do so with oil paints is an enriching and rewarding experience that lays a solid foundation for artistic endeavors: start simple, be enthusiastic, practice patience, and be willing to problem-solve. Painting still lifes is a great place to start.



Still lifes of everyday objects have been a part of the history of painting since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The term “still life” is derived from the Dutch word *stilleven* and also by its French title, *nature morte*; such a painting is a piece that features an arrangement of inanimate objects.<sup>1</sup> Still lifes give many beginning artists the ability to successfully construct a composition of elements that interest them, which helps keep the artist's interest and makes the final painting more personal. According to artist Rainie Crawford, an artist must remain flexible throughout the entire process of setting up a still life, from the lighting to painting it.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing a promising artist and professional artist should know is the visual vocabulary of art. The elements of art are the basic components, or building blocks: color, value, line, texture, shape, form, and space. The principles of art are the different ways the elements can be used in a work of art: balance, emphasis, harmony, variety, gradation, movement, rhythm, and proportion.<sup>3</sup> These are used by artists in countless combinations. By understanding these terms, one can understand how a work of art was created by others, and this provides the ability of artists to create unique and compelling works of art. It is important to know that artists cannot work effectively with just one element without considering the rest. The elements must work together, whether an artist is deliberate or is more spontaneous.

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly Richman-Abdou, “How Artists Have Kept Still Life Painting Alive Over Thousands of Years.” mymodernmet.com. An Elite Cafemedia Lifestyle Publisher, May 31, 2018. <https://mymodernmet.com/what-is-still-life-painting-definition/>.

<sup>2</sup> E. Lynne Moss, “Still Lifes of Meaning and Mood,” *American Artist* 65, no. 712 (April 2001): 40–75. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=503825903&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>3</sup> Gene Mittler, *Art in Focus* (Woodland Hills, CA: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 2006), 27.

Martha Guthrie is a still life painter who speaks to how still lifes are not necessarily easy and can require a lot of tedious planning. It normally takes her one to two days to set up and weeks to paint. She starts her still lifes by figuring out what she wants to emphasize. She then builds around that subject with other objects that she wants. David Koch is another painter who claims painting from life can be the best teacher for an artist because one can learn a lot by painting small simple still lifes set up in one's studio.

It is important to continue to improve the still life throughout the early stage and into the painting. If one is not happy with looking at the composition day after day, one will not be happy with the final painting, either. So, it is important to give the composition careful thought. The artist should know what the subject of the painting is, so it is communicated effectively to the viewer.

When looking for subjects to paint, look at one's interests. Crawford collects old toys, Oriental vases, jars, dolls, teddy bears, teacups, or whatever appeals to her. These subjects draw viewers into her paintings. She is interested in the formal elements and the placement of the horizon line. Formats can vary between square or rectangular. She pays close attention to how effectively colors, textures, silhouettes, shadows, sizes, and shapes of objects are used.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Gyurcsak, a still life painter, believes that painting subjects one is passionate about will help in one's overall engagement, but also encourages one to also get out of one's comfort zone to broaden oneself and to challenge one's skills. Grouping objects that one normally wouldn't group together is important to keep the still life interesting and dynamic. One wants to look for relationships and contrast in shapes, colors, textures, size, and placement. Like

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 40-75.

Guthrie, Crawford, and other still life artists, one will want to study the final arrangement, to make sure all aspects and perspectives of the still life are the way they should be. Next, find the point of view you want to paint from again, make sketches, and take photos to see how the final composition might look before even painting.

Lighting is another key element artists have to take into consideration. Typically, using one main light source, with another to fill in shadows, is the norm for Crawford, but artists can have the freedom to light their still lifes however they wish. Crawford works with a north light because it is a cool light that creates warm shadows. She also will use natural light, supplemented with artificial light. Gyurcsk speaks to using the same lighting as Crawford but reminds artists that one can use the light sources that work best for them and their still life set up. Wayne Thiebaud was interested in the concept of light and how it can affect the look and feel of a drawing or painting. He studied how lighting techniques were used in film noir movies and liked how it gave subjects a theatrical look. He would choose to use this theatrical lighting effect in his still life paintings. Often, using one light source helps create a more dramatic effect in his paintings.

Wayne Thiebaud is a still life painter who, like me, is fascinated with food as his subject. Food has been a main subject in so many still life paintings throughout history, but what makes Thiebaud's paintings stand out is his fascination with it. He enjoyed arranging the food in a ritualistic way that would tempt the viewer. His paintings also depicted food in social spaces, diners, coffee shops, and cafeterias. These paintings were unlike what many other still life artists painted because they depicted food in public environments, and many still life artists pick objects and arrange them in their studios. Details were important in his paintings, like the two olives on

top of sandwiches, the cherry on a slice of cake, or the carefully folded napkin, which helps provide a focal point of interest.<sup>5</sup>

In preparation to paint, both Crawford and Guthrie acknowledge that drawing is a critical skill and comment that it is good to do preliminary sketches before committing to one's final painting. Guthrie admits that she no longer finds it necessary, where Crawford makes thumbnail sketches with vine charcoal to test the arrangement, focusing on shapes and the pattern of lights and darks.<sup>6</sup> David Koch is a painter who only makes thumbnail sketches for his large scale paintings, as he prefers to use photographs and Photoshop for setting up his paintings.

Thiebaud would often plan his paintings out using black ink, looking for the values and harsh contrasts between black and white. He then tried painting sample paintings with watercolors, to work through his color concepts. However, he found that watercolor did not lend itself well to the way he painted with oil paints. He found pastels to be his medium of choice for sketching, as it resembled a similar look to oil paints.

Some artists say painting from photographs is easier than painting from life. Crawford uses black and white photography to help her look at overall values and check shadows and spatial arrangements. Lori Woodward Simons is a still life artist who thought that working from photographs would help improve her ability to paint. Taking several photographs of the subject

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<sup>5</sup> Isabelle Dervaux, *Wayne Thiebaud, Draftsman*. (The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London, 2018), 23.

<sup>6</sup> E. Lynne Moss, "Still Lifes of Meaning and Mood." *American Artist* 65, no. 712 (April 2001): 40–75. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=503825903&site=ehost-live>.

and selecting the best one would be the best approach for her. After working from photographs for a while, she realized that it was more difficult than she originally thought. She reasoned that her photographs lacked depth. She couldn't see into the shadows, and light areas were too bright. This caused her to paint only what she could see. She was invited to participate in a painting workshop where she had to exclusively paint from life. After her workshop experience, she completely changed her approach and found it to be the best teacher for her to understand what she was seeing. Artists like Norman Rockwell and Thomas Eakins were experienced painters who worked from both life and photographs. Photographic references have advantages; one can paint at any time and can come and go as they need. It can help in capturing the moment. Take, for example, fresh flowers, which will wilt and die if you don't paint fast enough. Photographing them will allow the artist to start her painting from life, and then if needed, it can be finished using the photographic references. Using photo editing software is an important tool to help with brightness and contrast and will help in achieving better results.

David Koch views photographs as a necessity for his art because of time constraints. He is aware the camera can't record all the subtle color variations the eyes see.<sup>7</sup> Because of this, he relies heavily on the skills he developed painting from life. He will occasionally paint from black and white images, so colors can be pushed in the direction he desires. Photoshop is one of Koch's main tools. He enjoys using the program to manipulate particular areas in the

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<sup>7</sup> Price, Linda S. "Using technology to create ageless paintings: Utah artist David Koch likes to bring elements of his state's pioneer past into his computer-aided compositions." *American Artist*, September 2008, 26+. *Gale General OneFile* (accessed September 15, 2019). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A181814426/ITOF?u=sain20269&sid=ITOF&xid=4dfb45a7>.

composition. “It speeds up the process,” he says.<sup>8</sup> Being able to see many different options, all at once, helps him make better decisions. He uses his Photoshop manipulated compositions to show clients, giving them a better idea of what the finished painting could look like.

Joseph Gyurcsak, in his still life painting, observed the work of Morandi and Cézanne, who are both prolific still life painters. In examining Morandi's still lifes, he reminds us how rich a still life painting can be if one understands and embraces the genre of still lifes.<sup>9</sup> Morandi used a limited palette to create many of his still life paintings. Gyurcsak did the same in his attempt to create a still life, feeling that his limited palette would create color harmony. He also used a light wash of burnt sienna, using Utrecht Alkyd Glazing Medium, on his canvas and let it dry for a few weeks before beginning his final painting. This ensured that it would not become wet again when the painting process started. This process is called “fat over lean”.<sup>10</sup> Thiebaud would approach his early still life paintings by just painting directly on the canvas, with no underpainting. This style of painting contradicted how many still life painters approached their paintings. Thiebaud also studied Morandi’s work, trying to imitate his painting style. He would often try to recreate his work, to learn the methods and techniques Morandi used. Koch creates most of his paintings using a technique called *alla prima*, which is a style of painting where an

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 26+.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Gyurcsak, “Using Subtle Grays in Still Life Painting.” *American Artist* 71, no. 782 (December 2007): 72–77. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=504404206&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>10</sup> Alistair Adams, *Drawing & Painting Techniques*. (Edited by De Agostini UK Ltd. London, Amber Books Ltd, 2007), 46.

artist paints wet on wet. This typically means a painting can be completed in one session because one constantly keeps applying paint, moving, and mixing as one works through his or her painting. Koch enjoys the ability to put the paint on thick and push it around his canvas, seeing immediate results.<sup>11</sup> He feels this process works best for him because he doesn't have a lot of patience.

The key to creating grays in oil painting is to not use black and white, but to use various color combinations. Gyurcsak mentioned he achieved the gray-green he wanted for his painting using yellow ochre, ultramarine blue, and permanent alizarin crimson. He recommends always mixing a secondary color and then adding a complement of opposite value and temperature to get rich grays.<sup>12</sup> Morandi and Cézanne used grays to help transition between colors.

Painting with oil paints can be wonderful and frustrating at the same time. Oil paints are made by grinding pigments with a drying or semi-drying vegetable oil, such as linseed oil, walnut oil, safflower oil or poppy oil.<sup>13</sup> The colors are often rich and come out of the tube thick. This is perfect for using a painting technique called impasto, which is a technique of painting where the paint is applied in a thick manner because oil paint has sufficient body to hold shape.

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<sup>11</sup> Price, Linda S. "Using technology to create ageless paintings: Utah artist David Koch likes to bring elements of his state's pioneer past into his computer-aided compositions." *American Artist*, September 2008, 26+. *Gale General OneFile* (accessed September 15, 2019). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A181814426/ITOF?u=sain20269&sid=ITOF&xid=4dfb45a7>.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Gyurcsak, "Using Subtle Grays in Still Life Painting." *American Artist* 71, no. 782 (December 2007): 72–77. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=504404206&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>13</sup> Ray Smith, Michael Wright, and James Horton. *An Introduction to Art Techniques* (London: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 1995), 276.

Oil paints can be diluted easily, using paint thinners and turpentine. Real turpentine comes from pine trees and is one of the oldest solvents for diluting oil paints.<sup>14</sup> The solvent thins the oil in the paint. It can leave a matte finish on the painting surface, so linseed oil is often used with turpentine to help replace the lost oils and keep the sheen.

Mediums are something that can be added to oil paints to help make a certain consistency, so brushstrokes are predictable and dependable.<sup>15</sup> Oil mediums thin paint, allowing for an increase in the luminosity, which allows an artist to use specific brushes, like sable bristles. There are several different options for artists to use and they vary, based on an artist's preference.

Materials to paint on with oil paint vary, from using canvas linen that is primed or unprimed to using woods and other hard surfaces. Primed canvases are the preferred choice for most painters, as it responds well to the brush. Acrylic gesso is most often used to prepare a surface because it seals it, allowing the oil paints to be more workable.

To get an image onto a canvas to begin painting begins with using a method that works best for the artist. The preferred method for painters working from life is to free hand draw or paint the contours of the objects onto the canvas. If photographs are used, an artist can use a scaled grid drawing. An example would be to draw a 1 inch by 1 inch grid on top of the photo, depending on the proportions of the photo, and on the canvas, an artist may double the grid,

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<sup>14</sup> Alistair Adams, *Drawing & Painting Techniques*. (Edited by De Agostini UK Ltd. London, Amber Books Ltd, 2007), 46.

<sup>15</sup> Willard, Christopher. "Using Medium with Oil Paint." *American Artist* 64, no. 697 (June 2000): 12–15. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=503677545&site=ehost-live>.



meaning they will be using a 2 inch by 2 inch grid on the canvas. Then, the artist will want to transfer the contour lines of the objects into each grid.

Cézanne demonstrated his ability to create form with his use of colors. The way he positioned his brushstroke of color was used in a way that could give the object shape. It is important for an artist to not focus on the contour line of a shape, but let the colors, details, and values create the shape of the object. This way, the artist will be less focused on what they are trying to paint, and this technique will allow for the subject to naturally appear. Applying paint in layers is considered to be a process many artists prefer to use.

Gyurcsak advises artists to stop and put their brushes down and take a few steps back to assess their paintings.<sup>16</sup> This is something a painter should do every once in a while. This step is meant to help artists see their painting from a point of view that most people will see it from. An artist mustn't let their painting get too tight and lose expressiveness because of working too close. Artists need to make a decision as to when they feel their painting is complete. Crawford knows a painting is complete when she cannot think of anything else to make it better.<sup>17</sup>

Learning to paint still lifes can be great for both novice and advanced painters. It teaches the artist to use the elements and principles, lighting, shadows, composition, use and control of mediums, and the selection of materials. Still life painting has not changed much throughout

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Gyurcsak, "Using Subtle Grays in Still Life Painting." *American Artist* 71, no. 782 (December 2007): 72–77. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=504404206&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>17</sup> E. Lynne Moss, "Still Lifes of Meaning and Mood." *American Artist* 65, no. 712 (April 2001): 40–75. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=503825903&site=ehost-live>.

history. Artists continue to paint inanimate objects that may have personal meaning to them, but for others, it is for the sake of improving their technical skills. The importance of subject, arrangement, composition, and lighting continue to be stressed in the setup and creation of still life paintings. The subjects that appear in still lifes tend to be reflections of the artist's interests and technique skills.

Oil painting has had subtle changes throughout its history, and artists have been willing to push the medium, with a variety of experimentation techniques. Oil remains a reliable place to start, with plenty of room to reflect an artist's unique perspective and style.

While there is no right or wrong way to paint, oil painting of still lifes provide the most accessible format through which an artist can build a strong artistic foundation while expressing oneself creatively. Anyone can learn to paint, and painting still lifes, using oil paint, is a great place to start.

### **Methodology**

Through my painting process, I felt it was important for me to learn to recognize potential works of art captured in the remains of food. I also found it more meaningful to both myself and the viewer if there was a narrative tied to the painting. Why am I photographing this and possibly painting it? After discovering my subject, I would photograph the remaining food. When lighting my subject, I was inspired by Wayne Thiebaud's paintings of food. His painting, *Four Sandwiches* (1965) is an example of how he would often create a one spotlight theatrical effect on his subjects. This would cast a fairly harsh shadow that would help in establishing a base or a sense that the subject is sitting on something. I would also allow for values and form to develop in the details of the subject. This theatrical style of lighting was how I wanted to try to portray

my subject as well. I would often use just one key light to help create this effect. I feel using this style of lighting gives the subjects in my painting a sense of being in the spotlight. The inspiration for my paintings is unpredictable, so when I find inspiration, I find that I must try to take a photo of my subject before it gets thrown away or goes bad. I feel this concept of waiting and looking for moments of inspiration in eaten food is one of the innovative ways I am pushing the field of still life painting.

My work is also innovative in the way I paint because, with every brushstroke I make, I am sharing an emotion. At first, this emotion is just between me, the paint, and the canvas. As I work through the process of mixing colors and applying those colors effectively and purposefully, I am bringing emotion and thought into my painting. After it is completed, there is another level of emotion that is shared. Each viewer of each painting will have his or her own thoughts and emotions tied to each completed painting. I also feel that my work is paying homage to the original creator of the art seen in the remains of the food. These simple moments of not being able to finish one's food that has turned into art are now moments that can be conversation starters, and what I have heard so far from viewers of my work is that it brings back memories of when they were kids with how they never finished their food. I have also received comments about how it has made them think about why they didn't finish their food. The concept of partially-eaten meals, or perhaps just that one leftover morsel, seems to have connected with viewers as a sort of universal human experience, at least in American culture. These emotional connections are also examples of my work being innovative.

Artist Francis Bacon speaks to why painting continues to be relevant today. It is by the means by which the material of paint can be utilized, manipulated, and perceived through entire sensory and bodily mechanisms. He goes on to talk about the way an artist handles the pigment

and how it behaves on the material. This can release transformative qualities to both painter and viewer. The painter needs to let the paint speak to them with how they construct and work through his or her painting.

Throughout the nineteenth century, painting reached a point of political sense and intention, which raised many different emotions. In 1840, painter Paul Delaroche had announced that with the new and revolutionary appearance of the photographic image, “from today painting is dead.” The fear was that photography would replace the need to paint images, and many academic painters were worried because photography could replicate the world so much quicker. As we know, the mechanical nature of photography did not replace the painting. Painting had something that photography did not, which was the act of an artist physically interpreting the world or their imagination with pigments of color in how they viewed it. This is why painting has continued to exist and thrive.

To produce my paintings, I used photography as a tool to capture my still lifes. After setting up my light source, I would take several photographs of my still life. I would constantly keep playing around with the direction of the light source and moving and turning the subject. I would also allow myself to photograph different compositions from different vantage points. After I felt the photo session was completed, I would upload my photos to the computer. I then studied all of the various photos, looking for the composition that spoke to me. After I decided on the photograph I wanted to paint, I edited the photo in Photoshop. I then placed grid lines over the photograph in Illustrator that matched the proportion of the canvas I would be painting on. I then printed my photograph in color with the grid lines on it. I prefer to draw from a printed photograph versus looking at it on my screen, like David Koch does. If needed, I would

go back and zoom in or continue editing the digital version of the still life, even after I print a version of one.

My next step was to draw a grid system that matches the photograph on the canvas. After the grid was in place, I would then draw in all of the major contours of the subject in my photograph. When all contours were drawn, I would usually erase unneeded grid lines. If needed, my next step was to work out color ideas through sketching. I used the original photograph and any sketches I made to guide my painting. Depending on how I wanted to approach my painting, the original image and colors would help dictate what approach is most appropriate for me to consider.

The painting process began with blocking in colors in large chunks that helped to create a solid underpainting, because when I painted the second layer on the canvas, I no longer wanted the paint to be transparent. I often let this underpainting dry for a few hours or days, depending on if I wanted the paint to be blendable with the next layer. When I decided to continue my painting, I tended to approach it by putting the oil paint on my flat bristled brush, using the impasto technique. I then pushed paint around using brushstrokes from different directions, similar to how Cézanne and Koch work. I imagined myself as having the same feelings as Koch when it came to what brushes to use. We both like the angular look that flat brushes give oil paint. You can paint tight edges or let the brushwork define the edges of the subject. When a new color is introduced, I would just apply more thick paint onto the previous color. I would let them naturally mix, but if I didn't want this to happen, I would just continue to use the impasto technique of applying the paint on really thick. If needed, I would let that specific layer dry before applying new paint on top of it. When I needed to paint and define specific details, it would often be necessary to let the previous layer dry, so that I could use smaller brushes to

define the details. The details were often my last step in the process of painting. I found it paramount to step away periodically from my painting because I wanted to evaluate how the process was looking from a distance that most viewers were to view my work (assuming it would be hanging on the wall). As I neared the completion of each painting, I would always evaluate whether the colors, highlights, shadows, details, and the negative spaces were working well together, to highlight my message of the last bite or piece of food remaining.

### **Conclusion**

I feel great about the collection of paintings I was able to produce around my theme, *The Last*. Each painting in this collection has been a reflection of my family's eating habits, likes and dislikes of food, and the unique perspective of why my family couldn't eat the last bites or pieces of food. In starting this series, I had little experience painting. Throughout my journey into traditional oil painting, I have been able to learn the process, tools, and techniques on how to paint with oils. There has been a lot of trial and error, problem-solving, and experimenting to get the results I was looking for.

My collection of paintings is unique to the world of painting because of my approach in picking my subjects, both in how I discover them, what they mean, and how I chose to represent them. Throughout my research, there has never been another artist who both represented food in a last bite or last piece kind of way or by representing food after it had been eaten, at least not through a collection of paintings. Most still life painters spend time picking their subjects, arranging them in a specific way, and leaving them set up in their studio, painting them from life.

My work also stands out from other artists in this genre because of the style I painted in. Each artist brings their own style and flair to their paintings, and my work is no different. It has

been a great experience trying to explore the style and way I wanted to represent my subjects. Overall, I feel my style has been consistent, but it also shows subtle ways I approach each series of paintings differently. My first series of paintings (Figures 1 – 5) was a learning process for me to paint what I see while learning to mix colors and layer colors onto the canvas. As I continued my research, I continued to apply my style of painting (Figures 6 - 10) to what I learned by painting undercoats of color on the canvas. This allowed me to quickly place color on my canvas, so that I could build up the colors in layers as I worked to complete each one. I also tried not to use black in my work but build up dark tones through other colors. I feel this gave my shadows more life and made the overall painting more vibrant and real. In my next series of paintings (Figures 11 – 13), I scaled up my paintings from 18 inches by 24 inches in (Figures 1 – 10) to 30 inches by 40 inches in (Figures 11 – 16). This pushed me to figure out how to push paint around on my canvas in a different way. It forced me to use larger brushes and use my entire arm while I stood up to paint. For my final series (Figures 13 – 16), I continued to improve on mixing colors, layering colors, using larger brushes, pushing the paint in different ways, as well as exploring textures with both the subject and the surface the subject was on. I am very pleased with what I set out to do in creating a series of paintings that I can put on exhibit together. It has also helped me to establish myself as a painter, giving me the confidence to know that I can paint.

**List of Works**

**Figure 1:** *The Last Pickle*, 2019, 24" x 18", Oil on Canvas

On my eight-year-old son's 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, he asked for a giant jar of pickles for his gift because he loves pickles. My wife and I gave him a giant jar of pickles for his gift but so did his aunt. So, to his surprise, he received two giant jars of pickles that he insisted he would consume himself. This is the last remaining pickle from those two giant jars.





**Figure 2:** *The Last Donut*, 2019, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

My children love donuts, and whenever their grandfather visits, he usually brings each child two to four donuts. Despite my children's love for donuts, they do tend to get sick of them after eating them several days in a row. Because donuts become stale after a few days, no one wanted this last donut, so it just sat in the box until it was rock hard and no longer wanted.



**Figure 3:** *The Last Bites of Luke's Lunch*, 2019, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

My five-year-old son's favorite meal is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a banana. One day, after announcing he was finished eating his lunch, I went to throw his remaining food away; but when I took a closer look, I was struck by the way he ate his sandwich, leaving the crust and his last few bites. I found the half-eaten banana interesting as well. It made me question why he just couldn't finish the last few bites of his food.



**Figure 4:** *The Last Two Pieces of Birthday Cake*, 2019, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

We celebrated my son's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday with some birthday cake. After almost two weeks of trying to eat the entire cake, we just got tired of eating it. The last two pieces became so dry and stale that no one wanted them.



**Figure 5:** *The Last Loop*, 2019, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

One morning for breakfast, my son poured himself a bowl of fruit loop cereal and he ate the entire bowl except for one last loop floating in the bowl. I ask myself why? Why couldn't he eat the last one?





**Figure 6:** *The Last Cookie, The One Santa Didn't Want*, 2020, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

Every December, it is a tradition with my family to make sugar Christmas-themed cookies that my kids decorate. There were a few cookies they put way too many sugar sprinkles on. Every Christmas Eve, my kids each get to pick a cookie to leave for Santa Claus on our special plate that looks like him. When Santa came to our house, he refused to eat the cookie with the exorbitant amount of sugar on it and left it behind. He enjoyed the other two cookies and the glass of milk that was left for him.



**Figure 7:** *The Last Remains of Grilled Cheese*, 2020, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

I made grilled cheese sandwiches for lunch one day because my kids love them. They usually request two sandwiches each, but for some reason, my five-year-old son was not in the mood for grilled cheese sandwiches that day. I only gave him one because I knew he wouldn't eat all of it. This particular grilled cheese caught my attention because he only ate a few bites out of the middle of the sandwich and left the crust, leaving an unwanted grilled cheese sandwich on his plate.



**Figure 8:** *The Last Noodle From My Mac and Cheese*, 2020, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

One afternoon, I made a couple of boxes of Kraft Mac and Cheese for my kids and myself to eat for lunch. We all enjoy eating Mac and Cheese, and we usually always have a significant amount of noodles left in the pot that I have to refrigerate or throw away. I hate saving the remaining noodles because no one eats the leftovers, and I hate throwing away food because I was raised not to waste it. So, I often overeat because I have this frame of mind about the importance of finishing my food. So, I ate two full bowls of Mac and Cheese, and I was so full that when I got to the end of the bowl, there was nothing left except one noodle stuck to the spoon. I was so full that I just couldn't pick up the spoon to take the last bite.



**Figure 9:** *The Last Piece of Triple Chocolate Cheesecake*, 2020, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

The music students at the school where I teach sell cheesecakes as a fundraiser, and I bought a variety cheesecake, thinking that we could share it with my family the next time they visit. When my family came to visit, we offered the cheesecake to everyone. Everyone took a slice, except no one wanted the triple chocolate flavored one. Now most of us like a little chocolate, but no one was interested in the one that had triple the chocolate, so it just sat on the counter for hours. After everyone left, I moved it into the refrigerator, only to watch it sit in the fridge for several days. Finally, I decided before I threw it away that I would try one bite of it.





**Figure 10:** *The Last Bites of Pizza*, 2020, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas

My five-year-old son likes to eat pizza but doesn't like pepperonis on his pizza. He usually eats only one maybe two slices of pizza, but on this particular day, he ate the first two slices I gave him and wanted two more slices. I asked him if he was sure, and he said he was really hungry. So, I gave him his third and fourth slices of pizza. My entire family finished eating, and he was still working on his last two slices. I was working on cleaning dishes when he runs over and says, "Dad look, I made a portrait of you! The top crust is your hair, the pepperoni is your eyes, the other pepperoni is your nose, and the bottom slice is your beard." I thought it was priceless that my son was creative enough to use the remains of his last two slices of pizza to make a portrait of me.



**Figure 11:** *The Last Bite of Melted Ice Cream Cake*, 2020, 30" x 40", Oil on Canvas

This spring, my family celebrated my son's 9th birthday, and we were looking to do something different because we were limited with what we could do because of COVID-19. I suggested that we get an ice cream cake from Dairy Queen because he never had one before. My wife and I have not had one since we were kids, and we both remembered them being delicious. He agreed that he thought it would be a great idea to try one. So, I called the nearest DQ, which was about 45 minutes from my home, to find out if they still sell them. They said they did, and they told me the different flavors they had. I asked my son what flavor he wanted, and he chose cookies and cream. I made the 45-minute drive to DQ to pick up his ice cream cake. When I got back from DQ, we celebrated his birthday by singing happy birthday to him. I then cut and served everyone in my family a slice of cake. While everyone was eating, they commented on

how delicious it was and how it was such a good idea to get this cake. As everyone finished their cake slices, they put their empty bowls on the counter. After I finished my slice, I approached the counter to notice several empty bowls except for one. I called out for the person who didn't eat their entire slice. "Who didn't eat the cookie crust?" My daughter responded that it was her. "Why didn't you eat it?" I asked. "You said you loved it." She responded, "I liked everything but the crust." I said, "you love cookies, how can you not like the cookie crust?" "I don't know; I just didn't like it," she said. This last bite caught my attention and I thought it would be a great painting to be a part of my last series.



**Figure 12:** *The Last Blueberry Muffin*, 2020, 30" x 40", Oil on Canvas

One morning, I made some blueberry muffins for my family for breakfast. I served everyone their muffins with butter brushed on top and everyone except for my 5-year-old son normally eats the entire muffin. When I was cleaning up from breakfast, it was no surprise to me to see my 5-year-old son's plate still had one muffin remaining on it. But what made this muffin so intriguing to me was that there was only one bite taken from the top of the muffin. In looking closer at the muffin, I noticed he only ate the muffin where I put the butter. So, he ended up having a little muffin with his butter for breakfast. When I took the muffin to my studio to light and photograph it, I noticed how the bite taken from the top of the muffin cast a profile bite taken out of the muffin. I thought it was very intriguing and added to the narrative and helped define the bite taken out of the muffin.



**Figure 13:** *The Last Cherry*, 2020, 30" x 40", Oil on Canvas

Cherries are one of my 9-year-old son's favorite fruits. He gobbles them up like there is no tomorrow. He would eat a whole bag if he was allowed to. My family and I enjoyed eating our lunches outside on our front porch last spring, and we served cherries as part of one particular meal. My 9-year-old son was eating nothing but cherries, and when he got to the last one, it accidentally slipped out of his hand and rolled on the ground. He picked it up and was just about to eat it until I stopped him. I mentioned to him that the cherry was just rolling on the ground, and was he sure he still wanted to eat it? He didn't seem to care because he loves cherries and was so focused on eating them all. Luckily, he agreed not to eat it and set it on his plate. What is seen in this painting is the last cherry that didn't get eaten -- and for a good reason.





**Figure 14:** *The Last Muffin in the Pan*, 2021, 30" x 40", Oil on Canvas

On Saturday mornings, I have time to make something special for breakfast. When we have muffin mix in the house, my children request that I make muffins. This is a simple breakfast I can make for them when my wife works on Saturdays. After Jude, Noelle, and I each eat three muffins, and my youngest son Luke eats two, we account for 11 muffins. This means there is always one muffin left in the pan. I often save the muffin in some sort of plastic container and put it on the counter for someone to eat another day, but no one ever does. That final muffin sits on the counter until it gets nice and moldy and has to be thrown away. I ask myself, why do I save it when I know it will just be thrown away?



**Figure 15:** *The Last Two Pieces of Pizza on the Pan*, 2021, 30" x 40", Oil on Canvas

Pizza is a popular choice of food in my family. Every time we make it, there always seems to be two leftover slices of pizza that no one wants. I am the person that often cleans up after mealtimes, so it is my job to decide whether to keep the last two slices of pizza or throw them away. I know my family well enough that if I choose to keep them, they will likely never be eaten.



**Figure 16:** *The Last Piece of Burnt Apple Pie*, 2021, 30" x 40", Oil on Canvas

Apple pie is my wife's favorite dessert, and she prefers to have pie for her birthday over the traditional cake. For her last birthday, we forgot to set a timer while making her apple pie, and the pie got burnt. We decided to try at least one piece of the burnt pie so it wouldn't get thrown in the garbage. The apple filling part was still okay, but the top got so burnt that it wasn't enjoyable to eat. This was the last piece of burnt apple pie that no one wanted.





**Figure 17:** *The Last Piece of Strawberry Pretzel Pie*, 2021, 30" x 40", Oil on Canvas

One day my wife was in a mood to bake. So, she searched on the internet for a dessert that sounded good and used ingredients we already had in our pantry. She found a recipe for strawberry pretzel pie. The crust consisted of crumbled pretzels with a strawberry gelatin-like top. Which I thought was an interesting combination, but we were all willing to give it a try. Everyone had a slice and for the most part, enjoyed it. After everyone was served there was only one slice remaining in the glass pie dish and our main refrigerator was full. So, I put the dessert on the top shelf of our garage refrigerator. Our garage refrigerator is the place where leftovers get forgotten about. So about 4 weeks later I opened our garage refrigerator to clean it out and there on the top shelf was the forgotten last piece of strawberry pretzel pie.

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